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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001753

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SUBJECT: FORMER TNA SPEAKER'S CHIEF OF STAFF ASSESSES NEW
PARLIAMENT

REF: A) BAGHDAD 1691 B) BAGHDAD 1664

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford
for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Chief of the Research Directorate at the Council of Representatives (CoR) and Chief of Staff to the former Speaker of the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) Saifaldin Abdul-Rahman told PolOff on May 22 that the current crop of parliamentarians is more sectarian and far less professional than those in the TNA. He expressed concern that the new CoR members were diminishing the access and responsibility of the CoR staffers, scotching the development of a professional parliamentary civil service in Iraq. As someone familiar with Tawafuq, Abdul-Rahman confirmed that senior Sunni Arab negotiator Ali Baban is a high-ranking politburo member of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), and claimed that Baban had very suddenly opted to participate in government formation talks - implying that he had only done so to gain a Ministry position. End Summary.

"The CoR Isn't What It Used to Be"

¶2. (C) Chief of the Research Directorate at the Council of Representatives (CoR) and Chief of Staff to the former Speaker of the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) Saifaldin Abdul-Rahman told PolOff on May 22 that the current crop of parliamentarians is more sectarian and less professional than those in the old TNA. Abdul-Rahman complained that Speaker Mahmud al-Mashadani will listen to anyone and typically agrees with the last person with whom he spoke. In contrast, Deputy Speaker Khalid al-Attiya is a stronger presence with more control over the Shia parliamentarians in the CoR. As chair of the May 22 session, according to Abdul-Rahman, al-Attiya easily controlled the Shia bloc, cutting down on debate, and in some cases making unilateral decisions on agenda items.

¶3. (C) Abdul-Rahman expressed concern that the new CoR members were significantly diminishing the access and responsibilities of the CoR Secretariat. Abdul-Rahman pointed to the draft CoR Bylaws, which restricted staff from the floor of the parliament. "They want to make staffers like second class citizens; they wouldn't even listen to any my ideas for the Bylaws," Abdul-Rahman complained. He warned PolOff that Minister of State for the CoR Safa al-Safi had opened an office across the street from the Convention Center (where the CoR meets) with a staff that was already

beginning to challenge longtime employees of the TNA and CoR. "While Dr. Hajim allowed me free rein to hire people based solely on competency and professionalism, this new CoR leadership seems intent on recreating sectarian divides in the CoR staff pattern," claimed Abdul-Rahman.

¶4. (C) Pointing out that Mashadani had opted not to chair the May 22 session, Abdul-Rahman stated that Mashadani was protesting over the proposed changes to his authority as Speaker (see reftel A). Abdul-Rahman added that he believed Mashadani was right to be concerned about efforts to diminish his authority, but agreed that his absence was not helpful. (Comment: Other sources subsequently told the Embassy that Mashadani was holding meetings with Tawafuq on its internal divisions. End Comment.) Abdul-Rahman also claimed that Mashadani fell out with CoR member Sheikh Abd al-Nasir al-Janabi over his walkout during the cabinet confirmation session (see reftel B). Mashadani felt that al-Janabi was trying to control him, according to Abdul-Rahman. (Comment: Again, we are hearing conflicting stories: President Talabani's Chief of Staff Kamran Karadaghi told PolOff on May 23 that Mashadani had called Talabani personally to ask for a meeting between Talabani and National Dialogue Council members Khalaf Alayan and al-Jenabi. At a meeting with the Ambassador on May 22 (septel) where both Mashadani and al-Janabi were present, there was no evidence of any ill will. End Comment.)

Tawafuq Conflicted

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¶5. (C) Abdul-Rahman confirmed to PolOff that chief Tawafuq negotiator and new Minister of Planning Ali Baban is a high-ranking member of the Iraqi Islamic Party's (IIP) Politburo. According to Abdul-Rahman, Baban holds degrees in Economics and International Relations. His participation in the government formation process was a surprise, said Abdul-Rahman, because Baban had been so against Tawafuq's participation - implying that Baban had only done so hoping for a Ministry position.

¶6. (C) When asked whether he thought Baban would perform well as Planning Minister, Abdul-Rahman shrugged and noted that he had pressed Tawafuq to nominate Iraqi Ambassador to Japan Ghanim al-Jumaily for the post: al-Jumaily had worked on the Hubble project for NASA and most recently had been the Research and Development director for a Fortune 500 American firm.

Comment

¶7. (C) Much of what Abdul-Rahman told us is classic Iraqi political gossip and rumor, and we report it in part to give a sense of the kinds of theories that float around here daily, even with relatively sophisticated contacts. Saifaldin Abdul-Rahman is a Sunni Arab and an American citizen, whose father is a longtime Tawafuq member. Abdul-Rahman's family ties and his position as former Tawafuq member and TNA Speaker Hajim al-Hasani's Chief of Staff gave him entree into Tawafuq's inner circle. (Note: Hasani ran for the CoR on the Iraqiyya list. His Iraqi Islamic Party roots have been strained after he bolted from the Party and ran for the INA in 2005 - which the IIP boycotted. End note.) Abdul-Rahman's reservations toward Shia independent and CoR Deputy

Speaker al-Attiya, however, reflects his belief that al-Attiya resents his presence. Abdul-Rahman mentioned twice during the meeting on May 22 that al-Attiya unaccountably seemed to hold a grudge against Abdul-Rahman. For his part, Mashadani has had nothing but praise for Abdul-Rahman's advice and professionalism in separate meetings with PolOffs. Abdul-Rahman bristled when PolOff suggested he give Mashadani more advice if he feels the Speaker is not performing. Abdul-Rahman responded by saying "I don't work for the Speaker, I work for the Council." Abdul-Rahman is married with children, and speaks fluent English. His ease with English and Arabic, plus his comfort with American culture, has made him an important contact within the legislative branch of the Iraqi government.

KHALILZAD